MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

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CONAN

THE BARBARIAN®

THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON

BY DON KRAAR, GARY KWAPISZ, AND ART NICHOLS

THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON

MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

CONAN™

THE BARBARIAN

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Know ye, O Prince, that in the centuries after the Great Cataclysm, more than five thousand years before the rise of The Hyborian Age, thrived a kingdom forged by sorcery and suckled on evil known as Acheron. For twenty five centuries, purple towered Python, crown city of the Acheronian Empire, held court in a reign of terror. Three thousand years after its fall the races of the Hyborian world would only dare to speak of ancient Acheron in hushed tones of whispered fear. The ancient kingdom of evil spawned legends—legends of conquest, legends of necromancy, and legends of treasure long buried and all but forgotten. But, of all the tales that were told, none had the power to terrify and entice as that of . . . THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON.

from *The Nemedian Chronicles*

THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON

BELVERUS, CROWN CITY OF NEMEDIA, WHERE THE CITADEL OF THE RED DRAGON LOOMS OVER THE CITY LIKE A SCARLET SHADOW AND TALES OF IT'S TORTURE CHAMBERS HAUNT MEN'S MINDS. BUT, IN AN INN NEAR THE MARKETPLACE A BARBARIAN IS GIVING THE NEMEDIANS A LESSON IN DEBAUCHERY...

PLEASE, CIMMERIAN, YOU PROMISED US ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE GOLD COINS IF WE STAYED ALL NIGHT.

AND I KEEP MY PROMISES-- MOST OF THE TIME. JUST LET ME FIND THAT PURSE OF GOLD AND YOU'LL HAVE YOUR COINS, GIRL.

WAIT, WASN'T THERE ANOTHER WENCH HERE LAST NIGHT?

YOU MEAN YOU'RE TOO DRUNK TO REMEMBER? SHE LEFT AT DAWN.

IT LOOKS AS IF THE LANDLORD CAN'T WAIT FOR YOU TO PAY THE BILL AND BE GONE.

I SUPPOSE IF I BREAK HIS OTHER ARM HE MIGHT BE PERSUADED NOT TO INTERRUPT MY PLEASURE.

WHAT WAS THAT OTHER GIRL'S NAME?

WHAT NEED DO YOU HAVE OF HER WHEN YOU HAVE US, CONAN?

YOU'RE SO BESOTED YOU CAN'T REMEMBER HER NAME, CAN'T FIND YOUR GOLD, AND YOU FORGOT TO PAY THE LANDLORD!

I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT COUNTRY I'M IN!

HE'S ANGRY ABOUT HIS BROKEN ARM...

SO MAYBE HE'D LIKE A BROKEN NECK!

WHAT IF IT ISN'T THE LANDLORD?

CIMMERIAN! OPEN THE DOOR OR WE'LL CHOP IT DOWN!

BUT, FIRST I'LL HAVE ANOTHER DRINK.

WELL, WE'LL FIND THAT PURSE OF GOLD, IF THE OTHER WENCH HASN'T MADE OFF WITH IT.

HOW MUCH WINE CAN A MAN HOLD, CIMMERIAN?

HAVEN'T YOU HAD ENOUGH? YOU'VE BEEN AT IT FOR THREE DAYS?

YOU'LL KNOW WHEN I'VE HAD ENOUGH, WENCH.

YOU SEE? THERE HE IS.

THAT'S THE BARBARIAN THAT GAVE ME THE PIECE OF ACHERONIAN GOLD.

AYE, BY CROM, THERE WAS ANOTHER WOMAN, ALL RIGHT. IF ONLY I COULD REMEMBER THE SLUT'S NAME.

CIMMERIAN, YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!

WELL, IT ISN'T THE LANDLORD AFTER ALL.

HAVE YOU COME TO ARREST ME FOR RAVAGING THE VESTAL VIRGINS OF ASTORETH?

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, PRINCE TARASCUS, DESIRES AN AUDIENCE WITH YOU REGARDING YOUR ACHERONIAN GOLD.

THANK THE PRINCE... ¡GLUB!... BUT TELL HIM I HAVE OTHER PLANS.

YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO THE CITADEL OF THE RED DRAGON, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, AND WE'RE HERE TO SEE THAT YOU GO.

YOU?' AND HOW MANY LEGIONS?

MAYBE THEY WANT TO TAKE YOU TO THE TORTURE CHAMBER. YOU MUST BE A VERY WICKED MAN, CONAN.

YOU'D BETTER GET REINFORCEMENTS, YOU NEMEDIAN PIG!

A MEASURED YARD OF HYRKANIAN STEEL WILL TEACH THEM HOW WICKED I AM... *HUH?!*

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THIS, YOU BARBARIAN?

THEN I'LL TAKE MATTERS IN HAND WITHOUT IT! AND THEN I'LL HAVE A TALK WITH THAT HARLOT IN THE STREET!

UGH...

THAT'S ENOUGH, BARBARIAN!

NOW I REMEMBER THE SLUT'S NAME-- *MAGDA!*

AND I HAVEN'T HAD NEARLY ENOUGH!

MAGDA!

FOR THE LOVE OF MITRA, WILL YOU KEEP IT QUIET UP THERE?!

I THOUGHT YOU SAID HE WAS DRUNK, GIRL?

AYE, I DID. BUT, I ALSO TOLD YOU HE WAS DANGEROUS AND YOU PROMISED TO PROTECT ME.

MAGDA, YOU NEMEDIAN STRUMPET. I WANT A WORD WITH YOU!

JUST AS SOON AS I FINISH STOMPING THESE MAGGOTS!

YOU'RE GOING TO SEE THE PRINCE IF WE HAVE TO CLAP YOU IN IRONS, CIMMERIAN.

HOLD HIM STILL WHILE I SETTLE ACCOUNTS WITH HIM.

SHOW ME THOSE IRONS AND I'LL KNOCK YOUR TEETH OUT WITH THEM!

GOODBYE, LADIES. IF YOU FIND THAT PURSE OF ACHERONIAN GOLD, IT'S YOURS. IT'S BROUGHT ME NOTHING BUT BAD FORTUNE.

MAGDA, IT'S TIME FOR US TO HAVE A LITTLE TALK.

LOOK OUT, THE BARBARIAN'S GONE MAD!

AHHHEEEEE...

MAGDA...

THAT'S FAR ENOUGH, CIMMERIAN!

. IF YOU BETRAYED ME TO THESE NEMEDIAN JACKALS, I'LL THROW YOU IN THE DEEPEST CESSPOOL I CAN FIND.

PLEASE, CONAN THE PRINCE ONLY WANTS TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE ACHERONIAN GOLD

KEEP YOUR SWORDS SHEATHED, THE PRINCE WANTS HIM ALIVE!

STOP HIM! YOU SAID YOU WOULDN'T LET HIM HURT ME!

AYE, KEEP YOUR SWORDS SHEATHED. JUST LET ME GET MY HANDS ON ONE AND I'LL SPLIT YOUR SKULLS!

YOU'RE TRYING OUR PATIENCE, BARBARIAN!

I'M ALL OUT OF PATIENCE

STOP IT, I SAY! YOU'RE DESTROYING MY BEST POTTERY!

BETTER A BROKEN POT THAN A BROKEN SKULL, MERCHANT!

HAVE IT YOUR OWN WAY!

UHHH!

WAIT! YOU CAN'T TAKE MY PREMIUM SAUSAGE WITHOUT PAYING FOR IT!

IT'S NOT FOR ME, HOG BUTCHER!

I JUST WANT TO SERVE IT TO THEM

HERE, EAT THIS!

UUGH!

AND THEN YOU CAN JOIN ME IN SOME WINE.

MASTER... MASTER... LOOK...

IT'S THE FINEST ZINGARAN RED YOU'VE EVER TASTED IT PUTS THE NECTAR OF THE HONEYSUCKLE TO SHAME ONLY TWENTY SILVER PIECES A A BARREL...

COME BACK, CIMMERIAN, WE HAVEN'T FINISHED PUMMELING YOUR THICK SKULL.

YOU'VE RUINED MY SHOP!

AND DESTROYED MY GOODS!

AND YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THE DAMAGES!

BUT FIRST, WE'RE GOING TO DAMAGE YOU A LITTLE!

THEN THE PRINCE CAN STRETCH YOU ON THE RACK!

BEAT HIM, BEAT HIM! HE KICKED MY DOG!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, BARBARIAN?

THESE GOOD PEOPLE ARE GOING TO JOIN ME IN A DRINK

ALL RIGHT YOU CIMMERIAN DEVIL, WE'VE HAD OUR FILL OF THIS.

SOLDIERS OF NEMEDIA, I DRINK YOUR HEALTH

WELL, I HAVEN'T HAD MY FILL

HERE, DRINK DEEP OF THIS!

BY ISHTAR, I'D SAY THE MEN OF NEMEDIA HAVE NO STOMACH FOR GOOD WINE.

BARBARIAN, YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS IN GOLD OR IN BLOOD.

SEND THE BILL TO PRINCE TARASCUS.

ARRGHH!

AND IT'S TIME YOU SAMPLED YOUR OWN WARES.

HERE! FINEST ZINGARAN RED!

CROM'S BONES, THIS SWATTING MAGGOTS IS THIRSTY WORK!

-GULP-

CAPTAIN, NOW THAT HE HAS PASSED OUT, HE'S BOUND TO BE MORE COOPERATIVE.

IN THE CITADEL OF THE RED DRAGON, SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN...

THE CIMMERIAN IS COMING AROUND, MY PRINCE.

.. UHH WATER..

AYE, HE'S COMING TO IT'S ABOUT TIME

USE HIM GENTLY, MY PRINCE. HE MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN UNLOCK THE RIDDLE OF THE MEDALLION

VERY WELL, GIVE HIM SOME WATER

HE PUT UP A GREAT STRUGGLE, MY PRINCE, WRECKING THE MARKETPLACE BEFORE WE FINALLY SUBDUED HIM

WELCOME TO THE THE TOWER OF PAIN, BARBARIAN GO ON, DRINK I KNOW HOW WINE CAN PARCH A MAN S TONGUE

I AM PRINCE TARASCUS, HEIR TO THE THRONE OF NEMEDIA YOU COULD HAVE MADE THIS EASIER ON YOURSELF HAD YOU NOT RESISTED MY HOSPITALITY NOT THAT IT WOULD HAVE MADE ANY DIFFERENCE IN HOW YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN RECEIVED

GET HIM UP

PLEASE OBSERVE. THESE ARE THE ACHERON GOLD PIECES THAT YOU GAVE THE STRUMPETS AT THE INN BY ROYAL EDICT, ALL ACHERONIAN ARTIFACTS ARE CROWN PROPERTY SO, YOU ARE GOING TO TELL ME WHERE YOU GOT THESE TRINKETS.

REMEMBER, YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON TELLING ME THE TRUTH.

EXPLAIN A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THEM, ZIMONIDES

THIS MEDALLION BEARS THE LIKENESS OF XALTANA, THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON, DEAD FOR OVER 3,000 YEARS IT MAY HOLD A CLUE TO THE LOCATION OF THE LOST TREASURE MINES OF ACHERON.

NOW WHERE DID YOU GET IT AND THE GOLD COINS?

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REMEMBER WHEN MY HEAD IS BUZZING LIKE A NEST OF HORNETS?

PLEASE, MY PRINCE, YOU PROMISED NOT TO HURT HIM

CONAN, I WAS ONLY OBEYING THE ROYAL EDICT.

SHUT THAT SLUT UP.

AS YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, CIMMERIAN, TRY TO REMEMBER

YES. PLEASE TRY WHEN TARASCUS DOESN'T GETS HIS WAY IT PUTS HIM IN THE MOST DISAGREEABLE MOOD

HELP HIM FIND THOSE OLD TREASURE MINES SO HE CAN AFFORD TO INVADE AQUILONIA THE THOUGHT OF CONQUEST ALWAYS BRIGHTENS HIS SPIRITS ISN'T THAT RIGHT, TARASCUS?

AYE, DEMETZIA AND I MUST ADMIT THAT PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE THAT I POSSESS IN SHORT SUPPLY.

CROM'S BLOOD, MAN, WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I NEITHER KNOW NOR CARE ABOUT THESE GOLD PIECES

I SUGGEST YOU START TO CARE AND THAT YOU START TO REMEMBER, NOW.

YES, AND PLEASE MAKE IT ENTERTAINING

YOU WANT THE TRUTH, THEN YOU'LL HAVE IT.

"SURELY YOU KNOW THAT LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS IN THE NORTH OF NEMEDIA, NEAR THE BORDER OF AQUILONIA AND THE BORDER KINGDOM, ARE A PEOPLE WHO HAVE DEFIED ALL ATTEMPTS TO SUBDUE THEM.

"IN PASSING THROUGH THEIR TERRITORY, I FELT NO REASON TO FEAR THEIR HOSTILITY TO INTERLOPERS. BUT, OTHERS WEREN'T SO FORTUNATE.

HELP ME, STRANGER ..I'M AS GOOD AS DEAD... JUST DON'T LEAVE ME TO THE WOLVES...

I CAN MAKE IT WORTH YOUR WHILE IF ONLY YOU'LL BURY MY REMAINS.

YOU SEE... GOLD...THE GOLD OF *ACHE*...

"I KEPT MY END OF THE BARGAIN."

NOT VERY ENTERTAINING OR CONVINCING, C MMERIAN PERHAPS A LITTLE DEMONSTRATION WILL ENCOURAGE YOU NOT TO INSULT MY INTELLIGENCE.

YOU MAY BEGIN.

PLEASE TARASCUS DON T I NEVER MEANT TO CALL YOU A LIAR I BEG YOU TO FORGIVE ME!

TARASCUS, L STEN TO ME ' FORGE T ABOUT THE LOAN I MADE YOU AND CONSIDER IT A GIF T ' I SWEAR I 'L NEVER MENT ON IT TO ANYONE '

AND I DARE SAY, HE NEVER WILL

YOU ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO ENTERTAIN A WOMAN, TARASCUS

LEAVE MATTERS TO THOSE WHO KNOW BEST, BALMUS

MUST THE PRINCE TAKE SUCH EXTREME MEASURES, MASTER?

AN EXCELLENT SUGGESTION, ZIMONIDES.

INTERESTING WHAT BOILING OIL CAN DO TO A MAN, ISN'T IT CONAN? HE WAS MY FRIEND AND I CAN'T SAY THAT I PARTICULARLY LIKE YOU AT ALL.

I TOLD YOU ALL THAT I KNOW

THEN WHY IS IT I FEEL THAT YOU'RE HOLDING SOMETHING BACK? I'LL JUST ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONFIDE IN ME.

ALL RIGHT, TARASCUS I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING BUT, KILLING ME WILL PREVENT YOU FROM FINDING ANYTHING.

THAT'S BETTER, CIMMERIAN I LIKE THIS NEW SPIRIT OF COOPERATION.

MAKE HIM TELL US EVERYTHING, MY PRINCE

NOW BRING ME DOWN

NOT BEFORE YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT MEDALLION YOU SHOWED TO THE STRUMPET AT THE INN.

AYE, I TOLD HER IT WAS A TREASURE MAP THE PICTOGRAPH CAN LEAD YOU TO THE LOST TREASURE MINES OF ACHERON, BUT ONLY IF YOU KNOW THOSE MOUNTAINS AS I DO.

YOU WERE RIGHT, ZIMONIDES THE PICTOGRAPH ON THE MEDALLION WAS A MAP. AND NOW WE HAVE A GUIDE TO LEAD US INTO THOSE MOUNTAINS

BRING HIM DOWN GENTLY.

NOW CHOOSE WHETHER YOU WANT TO LEAD US TO THE TREASURE MINES OR WHETHER YOU WANT TO STAY HERE THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH. I ASSURE YOU.

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF STAYING HERE JUST PLEASE PLEASE DON'T BEAT ME...

STOP HIM! I ORDER YOU TO STOP HIM BEFORE HE DOES SOME MISCHIEF

.. UNTIL I CAN DO AS MUCH FOR YOU!

HERE, DON T FEEL NEGLECTED!

UMHH...

GET HIM, BUT GET HIM ALIVE!

TARASCUS, THE CAGE HASN'T BEEN BUILT THAT CAN HOLD ME AGAINST MY WILL.

THAT'S FAR ENOUGH, CIMMERIAN.

NO, NOT QUITE FAR ENOUGH BUT I'LL BE BACK--BACK TO HAVE MY REVENGE ON THE PRINCE. I SWEAR IT BY CROM!

YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT, BARBARIAN. NO ONE HAS EVER ESCAPED THE CITADEL OF THE RED DRAGON.

THEN I CAN DIE TRYING.

AND WHILE I'M AT IT...

EEEEEAAHHHHHH...

. . .I CAN TAKE SOME OF YOU WITH ME.

SPLASH

WAIT, CIMMERIAN DON'T THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY BEFORE YOU KNOW WHAT WAITS BELOW.

I CAN SEE NOW WHY NO ONE HAS EVER ESCAPED THIS ACCURSED PLACE.

OF COURSE, WE ONLY LET THEM OUT IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER WOULDN'T WANT THEM TO CATCH COLD, YOU KNOW.

NO. NO . .

YOU CAN HAVE THE CROCODILES OR AN ARROW IN THE BACK--OR BOTH ON THE OTHER HAND YOU MIGHT WANT TO COOPERATE.

YOU WIN, TARASCUS.

BUT, IF YOU WANT MY HELP, YOU'D BETTER PLEDGE YOUR WORD TO FREE ME, AFTERWARDS, AND KEEP THAT PLEDGE.

NATURALLY. MY WORD IS MY BOND, CONAN. DELIGHTED YOU DECIDED TO JOIN US.

ON THE TRAIL IN THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINS NEAR THE BORDER OF AQUILONIA, TWO WEEKS OUT OF BELVERUS...

CLOSE IT UP! KEEP THOSE OXEN MOVING!

MY PRINCE, WE ARE APPROACHING THE MOUNTAIN PASS THE CIMMERIAN DESCRIBED.

SEND OUT A DETAIL OF SCOUTS TO FIND A CAMPSITE.

FORGIVE ME, ZIMONIDES, I AM ONLY A HUMBLE SCRIBE, BUT THERE ARE ASPECTS OF THE LEGEND OF QUEEN XALTANA OF ACHERON THAT FILL ME WITH DREAD.

BALMUS, CONCERN YOURSELF WITH TRANSLATING WHATEVER ACHERON HIEROGLYPHICS. WE FIND AND LEAVE OTHER MATTERS TO YOUR BETTERS!

PLEASE, CONAN, I'VE TRIED TO TELL YOU BEFORE. WON'T YOU LISTEN TO ME?

WE ARE SO VERY GLAD YOU DECIDED TO JOIN US, CIMMERIAN, SO VERY GLAD.

NOTHING YOU COULD SAY WOULD INTEREST ME.

CONAN, I BEG YOU TO LISTEN. I KNOW WHAT I AM, BUT I NEVER MEANT TO BETRAY YOU.

WHETHER YOU MEANT TO OR NOT, THE RESULT IS THE SAME.

TARASCUS WILL KILL US BOTH WHEN HE'S FOUND THE ACHERONIAN MINES. BUT, HE WON'T IF I HELP YOU ESCAPE.

WAIT UNTIL WE'RE BEYOND THE MOUNTAIN PASS. IT WILL BE HARDER FOR THEM TO TRACK US IN THE HIGH COUNTRY.

WE'LL MAKE CAMP HERE POST THE SENTRIES.

WELL, THIS HAS BEEN A LEISURELY EXPEDITION. IT'S ALL I CAN DO TO STAY AWAKE AT MY POST.

I SUGGEST THAT YOU DO. IF YOU DON'T WANT THE PRINCE TO DECORATE THAT PIKE WITH YOUR HEAD.

MORNING...

HAIL, SOLDIERS OF NEMEDIA. I NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE TO SEE A COLUMN OF ROYAL TROOPS IN THESE MOUNTAINS

SHEPHERD, IF YOU WANT TO CONTINUE TO LIVE YOU'D BETTER ANSWER PRINCE TARASCUS QUESTIONS AND BE QUICK ABOUT IT

AYE MY PRINCE THE RIVER VALLEY YOU SPEAK OF IS BUT A FEW LEAGUES BEYOND THE PASS BUT, IT LIES WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF THE SONS OF ACHERON AND THERE IS NO SAFE PASSAGE FOR OUTSIDERS

ENOUGH, SHEPHERD. THIS IS MY DOMAIN...

...AND IT'S TIME THESE SONS OF ACHERON LEARNED IT.

YOU'VE COME FAR ENOUGH, PRINCE TARASCUS. WE HAVE KNOWN OF YOUR COMING AND WE KNOW WHY YOU HAVE COME.

WHO DARES TO ADDRESS ME IN THIS FASHION?

WE ARE THE LAST PURE BLOODED DESCENDENTS OF THE EMPIRE OF ACHERON THIS IS OUR DOMAIN AND WE WILL DEFEND IT WITH THE LAST DROP OF OUR BLOOD.

THESE MOUNTAINS LIE WITHIN OUR BORDERS AND ARE UNDER THE REIGN OF THE ROYAL HOUSE OF NEMEDIA.

IN NAME ONLY, O GREAT PRINCE BUT IN FACT, THIS IS NOT YOUR LAND AND WE ARE NOT YOUR CHATTELS. THESE MOUNTAINS AND WHATEVER TREASURE THEY MAY HOLD ARE OURS BY RITE OF BIRTH.

LEAVE NOW, WHILE YOU STILL CAN

I WILL GIVE YOU ONE OPPORTUNITY TO THROW DOWN YOUR WEAPONS AND SWEAR FEALTY TO ME BEFORE I ORDER MY TROOPS TO ANNIHILATE YOU.

WE HAVE ALREADY GIVEN YOU YOUR CHANCE, O GREAT PRINCE.

THEY'VE DISAPPEARED.

WHERE DID THEY GO?

THEY WERE ONLY TRYING TO FRIGHTEN US.

NO, THEY DON'T WANT TO FRIGHTEN US

THEY WANT TO KILL US.

AHHHEEE ..

LET'S GO, MAGDA, WHILE WE STILL CAN.

CRASH

WHAT WILL WE DO NOW?

WE WAIT UNTIL NIGHTFALL

SOME OF THEM ARE STILL ALIVE

THEY WON'T BE BY TOMORROW.

BEFORE DAWN..

CONAN ..

NOT SO LOUD, GIRL.

I'LL TRY TO STEAL THE KEYS TO YOUR CHAINS.

NO NEED, MAGDA I COULD HAVE PICKED THE LOCKS AT ANY TIME.

THE PROBLEM IS TO DISTRACT THE SENTRIES LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO STEAL A HORSE.

THAT S NO PROBLEM.

DISTRACTING MEN IS MY SPECIALTY.

THERE'S A PRICE FOR INVADING OUR LAND--YOUR LIFE.

ZATER.

IT'S A COLD NIGHT, EH, SENTRY?

TOO COLD TO BE ALONE ON GUARD DUTY?

WHAT'S THE MATTER, SOLDIER, ARE YOU AFRAID TO LOOK AT ME?

MAGDA!

AHHH.

COME ON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE CAMP AWAKENS!

TO ARMS!

IT'S THE CIMMERIAN

DON'T LOOK BACK. IF THEY HIT YOU, YOU'LL KNOW IT.

CONAN...

AYE, I CAN SEE THEM.

WHAT NOW?

BETTER TO TAKE OUR CHANCES WITH TARASCUS THAN TO FACE CERTAIN DEATH.

CIMMERIAN, YOU ARE OUR PRISONER. DON'T TRY TO RESIST.

I WASN'T ABOUT TO.

AND IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T RIDE ANY FARTHER UP THAT PASS.

I 'M GOING TO HAVE THE HIDE FLOGGED OFF YOU, CIMMERIAN.

YOU ARE A REAL LEADER OF MEN, O GREAT PRINCE.

HAVE YOU RELIEVED YOUR PICKETS? GO ON CALL THEM.

SENTRY... SENTRY!

THEY DON'T ANSWER.

THEY'RE DEAD, TARASCUS, MURDERED IN THE NIGHT BY THE SONS OF ACHERON WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

IT'S TIME TO FACE FACTS YOU'VE COME ON A FOOL'S ERRAND

DEAD ALL OF THEM.

THERE IS NO TREASURE AND THERE NEVER WAS. I TOLD YOU THE SAME PACK OF LIES THAT I TOLD MAGDA WHEN I FIRST SHOWED HER THE MEDALLION

THE TOWER OF PAIN WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT I'M GOING TO DO TO YOU

...YOU DISHONORABLE BARBARIAN DOG!

I'VE BEEN AS HONORABLE WITH YOU AS YOU HAVE BEEN WITH ME. I TOLD YOU WHAT YOU WANTED TO HEAR IN ORDER TO SAVE MY SKIN

PRINCE TARASCUS

THE CIMMERIAN TOLD MORE OF THE TRUTH THAN HE REALIZED.

THE MEDALLION IS A NECROMANCER'S MEDIUM FOR ANYONE RECEPTIVE TO ITS MESSAGE.

LOOK! THERE IS THE SITE OF THE TREASURE MINES, JUST WHERE THE RAYS OF THE SUN POINT TO IT ON THIS--THE FIRST DAY OF SUMMER.

THAT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE PICTOGRAPH ON THE MEDALLION. AND THERE IS ANOTHER...

WELL, TARASCUS, PERHAPS IT WASN'T A FOOL'S ERRAND AFTER ALL.

SILENCE, DEMETZIA. LET BALMUS SPEAK.

IT IS A MESSAGE OF ANCIENT AND TIMELESS EVIL. I BEG YOU TO LEAVE IT AND LEAVE THIS PLACE.

I HAVEN'T COME THIS FAR NOT TO LEARN THE TRUTH, BALMUS. I HOPE FOR YOUR SAKE THAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED IT

WE'LL KNOW WHEN WE HAVE CROSSED THAT RAVINE.

THERE LOOK THAT'S NO NATURAL ROCK FORMATION

AYE BUT IF BALMUS IS RIGHT WE MAY BE ON THE THRESHOLD OF SOMETHING UNNATURAL

GO ON BALMUS TRANSLATE THE REST OF THIS TABLET

IT'S A WARNING, ZYMONDES--A WARNING NOT TO GO ANY FARTHER

WELL CIMMERIAN IT LOOKS AS IF YOUR LIES WERE PROPHECY

I'D RATHER THAT THEY WERE SIMPLY LIES THIS PLACE SMELLS OF EVIL I CAN SENSE IT BY ISHTAR

MITRA

MY PRINCE COME AND LOOK

A TEMPLE BUILT INTO THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN, BUT TO WHAT GOD?

AYE, ZIMONIDES, A TEMPLE AND MORE ..

THESE COLUMNS AREN'T DECORATIVE THERE'S A FAULT LINE IN THE ROOF OF THIS CAVERN THAT COULD BRING THE MOUNTAIN DOWN ON OUR HEADS

LOOK DEMETZIA, MINE TUNNELS

THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THIS THAN MEETS THE EYE

THERE IS INDEED, CONAN.

PRINCE TARASCUS YOU MUST TAKE A LOOK AT THIS

THIS TEMPLE WAS BUILT BY QUEEN XALTANA TO THE DEMON GOD OF ACHERON.

I KNEW BY THE LOOK OF IT THAT IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN DEDICATED TO SET

XALTANA ATTEMPTED TO SUPPLANT THE WORSHIP OF SET WITH THIS DEMON GOD. HER OWN SUBJECTS CONSPIRED AGAINST HER .

.. AND SEALED OFF THESE TREASURE MINES OUT OF FEAR OF THIS THING, WHICH THEY BELIEVED POSSESSED THEIR QUEEN

PRINCE TARASCUS, THIS DOOR WAS PROBABLY SEALED FROM THE OUTSIDE FOR A GOOD REASON. LET US LEAVE IT AS WE HAVE FOUND IT.

AYE, Z'MONIDES IS RIGHT

OPEN IT

WE MUST LEARN WHAT LIES BEYOND IT, BALMUS

WHATEVER SECRET THIS CHAMBER HOLDS APPEARS TO HAVE DIED WITH THEM. IN DEATH THEY WOULD BE SURE TO KEEP IT

MY PRINCE, WE HAVE FOUND SOMETHING.

HERE'S PART OF THE ANSWER.

A TOMB-- THE TOMB OF QUEEN XALTANA OF ACHERON.

WE HAD HOPED TO FIND NATURAL RESOURCES, ORE AND UNCUT JEWELS, BUT THIS...

HERE'S ENOUGH PLUNDER TO PUT AN ARMY IN THE FIELD TO LAY WASTE TO AQUILONIA, JUST AS YOU HAVE DREAMT, TARASCUS.

WHY IS IT THE HAIRS ON THE BACK OF MY NECK ARE TELLING ME WE SHOULD HAVE LEFT IT ALL ALONE?

I SHALL RULE AN EMPIRE.

AND I SHALL BE AT YOUR SIDE.

OPEN THE SARCOPHAGUS. I WANT TO BEHOLD THIS GREAT BEAUTY OF A BYGONE AGE.

NO, MY PRINCE, I BEG YOU...

OH, BALMUS, YOU'RE SUCH A BORE.

I'M SICK OF YOUR WHINING, BALMUS. NOW GET OUT OF THE WAY.

...DON'T.

AYE, IT COULD ONLY BE THE MUMMY OF XALTANA, THE WITCH QUEEN OF ACHERON.

NOT EVEN ALL HER MAGIC COULD FREE HER OF THE GRIP OF DEATH...

...OR HER BEAUTY FROM THE RAVAGES OF TIME.

I ONLY WISH THAT WE HAD NEVER FOUND THIS PLACE.

PRINCE TARASCUS, WE ARE BESIEGED BY THE SONS OF ACHERON.

DEMETZIA, STAY HERE WITH ZIMONIDES AND OUT OF HARM'S WAY.

IMAGINE, BEFORE TARASCUS CAN CONQUER AQUILONIA HE WILL FIRST HAVE TO DEFEAT AN ARMY OF GOATHERDS

EVERYTHING WILL COME IN GOOD TIME FOR YOU AND THE PRINCE, MY LADY

PERHAPS WE CAN LEARN SOMETHING OF QUEEN XALTANA AND THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING THIS PLACE

IN THE MEANTIME, LET ME SEE THAT SCROLL

HOW ODD, IT'S WRITTEN IN A LEMURIAN DIALECT WITH WHICH I AM FAMILIAR

IT SEEMS TO BE SOME KIND OF INCANTATION

THE SPARK OF LIFE LAIN DORMANT WITHIN ME WILL BURN AGAIN WHEN THESE WORDS ARE SPOKEN

HOW VERY ODD.

"THE SPIRIT THAT POSSESSES ME WILL SEEK A HOST OF LIVING FLESH AND BLOOD UNTIL I AM REBORN."

DRIVE THEM BACK NOW, BEFORE THEY HAVE A CHANCE TO RALLY!

HOLD THEM BACK! HOLD THEM BACK, I TELL YOU!

MY PRINCE, WE HAVE A HOSTAGE.

THEY VE RETREATED FOR THE TIME BEING BUT THEY'LL BE BACK, TARASCUS

THEN WE'LL GIVE THEM MORE OF THE SAME

MY PRINCE THE PRISONER IS READY TO BE INTERROGATED

TELL ME, DOG, WHY ARE YOUR PEOPLE SO BENT ON KILLING US?

BECAUSE WHAT YOU VE FOUND BELONGS TO US, ALL OF IT

WE HAVE SEARCHED FOR IT FOR CENTURIES NOW WE WILL UNLEASH THE POWER OF THE DEMON GOD AND RESURRECT THE PURPLE TOWERS OF PYTHON

AND F I CAN SEE THIS BEGIN I WILL DIE HAPPILY

AS YOU WISH

THUNK

"THE SPARK OF LIFE WITHIN THIS DEAD FLESH WILL KINDLE TO FLAMES WITHIN YOU "

"AND THE SPIRIT THAT POSSESSES ME..."

"... WILL FIND A NEW HOST WITHIN YOU WHEN OUR LIPS MEET"

AGHHH!

LADY DEMETZIA

LADY DEMETZIA, WHAT IS THE MATTER? WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

AGH... IT'S NOTHING... NOTHING...

... NOTHING THAT YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND, YOU OLD FOOL!

WAIT... WAIT... PLEASE... I'LL DO ANYTHING ONLY DON'T HURT ME

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING YOU CAN DO

GO ON, BALMUS, TRANSLATE THE REST OF IT.

QUEEN XALTANA WAS DRUGGED AND BURIED ALIVE BY THE PRIESTS OF SET, WHO IN TURN WERE EXECUTED TO KEEP THIS SITE SECRET.

SHE WAS POSSESSED BY THIS DEMON AND HER VERY BODY WAS HOST TO IT. 'EVEN IN DEATH IT LIES DORMANT WITHIN HER.

IT HAD THE POWER TO REPRODUCE ITSELF, DRINKING THE HEART'S BLOOD OF ITS VICTIMS IN ORDER TO METAMORPHOSE INTO ITS TRUE SELF AND SPAWN ITS OWN KIND.

NO, LADY DEMETZIA, NO. I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT.

NO, YOU'RE NOT LADY DEMETZIA...

...OF COURSE NOT. YOU ARE XALTANA, QUEEN OF ACHERON.

NOT QUITE...

I AM THE SPIRIT THAT POSSESSED XALTANA.

AND THERE IS ONLY ONE THING THAT YOU HAVE THAT I WANT...

...YOUR HEART.

MY PRINCE, I HAVE SPENT MY LIFE AS SCRIBE WORKING ON THE NEMEDIAN CHRONICLES IN THAT TIME I HAVE LEARNED TO HEED SUCH WARNINGS.

IF THIS THING HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM SPIRIT INTO FLESH THE NONE OF US ARE SAFE.

BY CROM, BALMUS, I FEAR YOU'VE HIT UPON THE TRUTH.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING IN WHAT YOU SAY, I SHOULDN'T LEAVE DEMETZIA ALONE.

AND IF YOU'RE WRONG, BALMUS, I'LL BOIL YOU IN OIL.

GO - - FIND THE LADY DEMETZIA AND ZIMONIDES AND DO NOT LEAVE THEIR SIDES.

LADY DEMETZIA?

ZIMONIDES?

ZIMONIDES!

CONGRATULATIONS, TARASCUS, YOU'VE LED US INTO A DEAD END WITH NO ESCAPE ROUTE, YOU'VE GOTTEN MOST OF YOUR MEN KILLED, WE'RE OUT OF ARROWS AND NEARLY OUT OF DRINKING WATER.

IF ANY OF US ARE GOING TO SURVIVE, YOUR MEN HAD BETTER START TAKING THEIR ORDERS FROM ME.

YOU PRESUME A GREAT DEAL, CIMMERIAN.

AGHHHHHEEEEEEEEE...

THERE'S NO TIME TO ARGUE.

LADY DEMETZIA... ZIMONIDES?

THERE ARE THE MEN WE SENT TO GUARD THEM.

GO ON, CIMMERIAN, YOU WERE SO ANXIOUS TO TAKE COMMAND, TELL US WHAT TO DO

FIND THE LADY DEMETZIA, FIND HER BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE FOR HER AND FOR ALL OF US.

NOW WE'LL DIVIDE INTO TWO SEARCH PARTIES.

NOTHING THIS WAY, MY PRINCE.

DEMETZIA!

THE SCROLL FROM THE SARCOPHAGUS, COULD THIS HAVE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT?

HAHHHHHH...

WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

DEMETZIA, IS THAT YOU?

MITRA BE PRAISED, WE FOUND YOU IN TIME.

HAAAHHHHHHHHM...

STAND BACK, THAT'S AN ORDER. LET ME TRY TO REASON WITH HER.

DEMETZIA, WHAT HAS POSSESSED YOU?

MITRA!

AND WHEN I'VE DONE WITH THESE, I'LL SUP ON YOURS.

UGHHHHH...

NO. IN THE NAME OF MITRA...NO!

YES, TARASCUS. IT'LL ALL BE OVER IN A MOMENT.

IT'S A PITY YOU WON'T LIVE TO SEE THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE.

BUT/ YOU'LL BE REMEMBERED FONDLY...

.. EVEN IF...

...YOU ARE...

.. A FOOL!

NO...

YOUR REIGN OF EVIL HAS ENDED BEFORE IT COULD BEGIN.

DEMETZIA!

YOU KILLED HER... KILLED MY DEMETZIA!

SHE WASN'T YOUR DEMETZIA. THE THING THAT POSSESSED QUEEN XALTANA HAD CLAIMED HER

I COULD HAVE REASONED WITH HER, I TELL YOU! I'LL MAKE YOU PAY FOR THIS, CIMMERIAN, I SWEAR IT!

WAIT... SHE'S STILL ALIVE!

GET AWAY FROM HER!

GET BACK!

THERE -- THAT'S WHAT LIVED WITHIN HER. IT WAITED 3000 YEARS TO FIND A LIVING HOST SO THAT IT COULD METAMORPHOSE AND SPAWN TRY TO REASON WITH THAT, TARASCUS.

YOU MEAN IT CAN THINK?

AYE, WE COULD SENSE IT THROUGH THE MEDALLION. THAT WAS ITS MEDIUM.

WHAT DOES IT WANT?

WHAT ALL NEW BORN INFANTS WANT... FOOD.

ON GUARD, MAN!

FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE, SOLDIER!

BY ASTEROTH AND ISHTAR...

...I SWEAR THERE WILL BE...

...NO MORE BLOOD FOR YOU!

YOU'LL HAVE TO WORK HARDER FOR YOUR BREAKFAST!

HERE, FEAST ON COLD STEEL!

AGHHHHHEEEEEEEEEE...

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN MAGDA...

COME ON, TARASCUS, I WOULDN'T EVEN LEAVE THE LIKES OF YOU TO DIE IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.

I CAN'T, I TELL YOU I CAN'T MOVE.

YOU CAN AND YOU WILL.

MAGDA.. BALMUS...

THAT THING HAS METAMORPHOSED AND SPAWNED.

CONAN, I FEAR IT BEGAN TO SPAWN EVEN BEFORE IT METAMORPHOSED.

THERE--DESTROY THEM BEFORE THEY EMERGE!

DESTROY THEM BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

TOO LATE, CONAN, TOO LATE!

CIMMERIAN, THE SONS OF ACHERON HAVE BROKEN THROUGH. WE ARE THE LAST SURVIVORS.

THEN LET'S SAVE OURSELVES WHILE WE CAN.

THEY'RE GROWING WITH EVERY BREATH THEY TAKE.

SO YOU'VE COME TO CLAIM THE LEGACY OF ANCIENT ACHERON.

THERE THEY ARE!

THERE--THE DEMON GODS OF ACHERON THAT YOU HAVE SOUGHT ARE WAITING FOR YOU.

BEHOLD AND PAY HOMAGE TO THEM.

IT IS THE DEMON GOD OF ACHERON IN THE FLESH--TWO OF THEM.

THEY WILL LEAD US TO VICTORY OVER THE HYBORIANS.

AND A NEW AGE FOR THE ACHERONIAN EMPIRE WILL BEGIN.

RUN, WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE!

AGHHHEEEEEE... EEEEEAGHHEEE... AWHHEEE...

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

WHAT DO YOU THINK? THE DEMONS ARE TEARING THEM APART.

RUN!

THE SCREAMING'S STOPPED. THOSE THINGS WILL BE UPON US IN A MOMENT.

THEN THEY'LL INHERIT THE EARTH.

THEY WON'T INHERIT ANYTHING IF THIS MOUNTAIN IS THEIR TOMB.

PUSH.

NOW THEY CAN DEVOUR STONE.

LET'S GO BEFORE THE ROOF COMES DOWN ON US!

NOW THEY BELONG TO THE AGES.

LET THEM KEEP THAT ACCURSED MEDALLION IN THE BARGAIN.

SUNSET, ON THE TRAIL THAT LEADS TO BELVERUS...

I'LL LEAVE YOU HERE WITH THE SHEPHERD. YOU'LL BE SAFE ENOUGH WITH HIM.

RIDE HARD AND RIDE FAST, CIMMERIAN, BUT ONE DAY THE VENGEANCE OF TARASCUS WILL CATCH UP WITH YOU.

FAREWELL, CIMMERIAN, AND MAY CROM RIDE WITH YOU.

CONAN, I'M SURE WE HAVEN'T HEARD THE LAST OF YOU. A MAN LIKE YOU WILL FIND HIS PLACE IN THE NEMEDIAN CHRONICLES.

BUT, NOT BEFORE WE MEET AGAIN, CIMMERIAN.

YOUR GRATITUDE IS TOUCHING, TARASCUS, AFTER I SAVED YOUR WORTHLESS LIFE. JUST BEAR IN MIND THAT THE ONLY REASON I'M LEAVING YOU ALIVE NOW IS THAT YOU AREN'T WORTH KILLING.

AND AS FOR YOU, MAGDA, THIS IS WHERE WE PART COMPANY

DON'T BE SO HASTY, CONAN. NOT WHEN I'VE GOT JEWELS FROM THE TOMB OF QUEEN XALTANA.

THEN I'LL HAVE TO GIVE A CUNNING WENCH LIKE YOU A SECOND CHANCE.

G. KWAPISZ '87

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MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

CONAN

THE BARBARIAN®

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